

PROFILE: HEATHER ROCHE

Born in Canada, clarinetist Heather Roche trained in England and now lives in Germany. She completed her BMus in 2005 at the University of Victoria, Canada, studying under Patricia Kostek, and her MMus (Orchestral Training) in 2006 at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, studying under Joy Farrall and Laurent Ben Slimane, in addition to conducting with Sian Edwards. Following her degree she completed residencies with the International Ensemble Modern Academy, at IMPULS in Graz, and with ensemble recherche in Freiburg, the Darmstadt Summer Courses 2008 and 2010, and the International Ensemble Modern Academy in Innsbruck, Austria.



Photo credit: Sam Walton

Heather is a fervent advocate of collaboration, and her PhD research at the University of Huddersfield (under the supervision of Dr Philip Thomas) explored the nature of dialogue within performer–composer relationships. She has given workshops in instrumental technique and/or iPad use in performance all over Europe. In 2014 she was awarded a DIVA (Danish International Visiting Artists Fellowship), and lived in Copenhagen for two months. Her website is host to one of the most widely read new music blogs on the internet, with nearly 40,000 hits from around the world in 2014. In 2014 she also successfully crowdfunded her first composition competition: six young composers were selected from 270 applicants to receive a €1000 commission to write new pieces, premiered in 2016. In 2016 she became Reviews Editor for *TEMPO*.

She has performed at many major European festivals, including musikFest (Berlin), BachFest (Leipzig), Musica Nova (Helsinki), Acht Brücken (Cologne), the International Computer Music Conference (Huddersfield, Ljubljana) and the Agora Festival (IRCAM, Paris). She has presented solo programmes at the Zagreb Music Biennale, the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, the New York Electroacoustic Symposium, at CIRMMT (Montreal), and with the Birmingham Electroacoustic Sound Theatre (BEAST). She has performed with musikFabrik (Cologne), ensemble Garage (Cologne), ensemble interface (Berlin), the Riot Ensemble (London) and ensemble proton (Bern). She is also a founding member of ensemble hand werk (Cologne). The next year sees hand werk performing in Munich, Lebanon, Croatia and the UK. She also plays regularly across the UK in a trio with Carla Rees (flutes) and Xenia Pestova (piano) and has recently formed an alliance with the accordionist Eva Zöllner.

Q: *What drew you into new music?*

A: When I was in my second year of university, I was the only clarinetist at the University of Victoria who could perform glissandi. I was

subsequently roped into a performance of Mauricio Kagel's 1898 that the University new music ensemble ('Sonic Lab') was performing, as a clarinetist who could do this is necessary for the piece. As far as first new music experiences go, Kagel is a pretty good one to have, and I'm forever grateful to Christopher Butterfield (then conductor of the Sonic Lab and now featured in this issue of *TEMPO*) for putting me in that chair.

I was also studying alongside composers like Anna Höstman, Sabrina Schroeder, Chedo Barone, Michael Berger, David Checchetto and eldritch Priest (with Cassandra Miller as a kind of ghostly presence; I was just a bit too young to have met her at UVic but never stopped hearing her name). Playing their works in exams was one of the great pleasures of my time as an undergrad and a great learning experience. In that isolated part of the world we don't have regular visiting ensembles to play student pieces.

A few years later, having done a Masters at the Guildhall in London in their Orchestral Training programme (a great course of study, but mostly I learned I never wanted a job in an orchestra), I went to IMPULS, a festival/short course for composers and new music interpreters, and met young players like me, many of whom were already making their living playing new music. I was beyond hooked by this point, and two months later applied to do my PhD with Philip Thomas in Huddersfield.

Q: As a performer you work in many different contexts. Do you have a preference?

A: No, I like the variety. If I played solo all the time I'd get lonely; chamber music comes with a lot of very hard work and extra rehearsal time; as a mid-scale ensemble player I miss my independence. Moving between the three of them keeps me fresh and able to enjoy the pleasures of the three: the deeper collaborative composer-performer time required by solo performance, the intricate working relationships of a high-functioning chamber ensemble – or indeed sometimes the adrenaline and thrill of chamber music with great musicians on too little rehearsal time, and the joy of being part of a large ensemble with (hopefully!) a great conductor at the helm.

Q: You've been blogging about gateway pieces of music – do you think this is an effective way to draw new listeners? Does it work?

A: I don't really have an adequate way of collecting data to know if my particular attempt 'worked', though it certainly has rated statistically as one of my more popular blog posts, and was the most widely shared one on social media (but still is a relatively small fry compared to what even a moderately well-known pop music writer might bring in). My blog is, however, aimed at composers, so mostly it worked in the other direction, by introducing composer-readers to 'pop' music they'd not heard before, or to lovers of both kinds of musics who appreciated (or were amused by) my comparisons. Your question also begs the question of what 'working' means. For me, this post was a bit of an experiment, and I certainly relish the freedom the blog gives me to indulge in these experiments. I am definitely going to continue with them (alongside continuing to build up the clarinet resources side of the blog). So on that level it worked.

As to whether it's part of my job to promote new music to new audiences, and whether this is ever going to work is a very big question and not something I've got very far with, other than occasionally lamenting playing concerts to groups of 30 to 50 people all of whom I

can name. I think this post was responding to other things, rather than my attempt to trick unsuspecting pop music lovers into discovering Elena Rykova's music, for example. Partly it was also a reaction against an anti-popular music snobbishness I've encountered in our new music circles. Partly it was my wanting to take more responsibility for the music I like, as it's quite easy as a performer to deflect questions of taste by chalking things up to what one is currently getting paid to play. It also widened the audience of my blog, if only briefly, which was practical on a promotional level (while I'm being honest). But mostly it was meant to be a fun and playful comparison of music I like.

Q: There's been a big interest recently, and not only in TEMPO, in Canadian music. Is there something distinct about the scene in your homeland?

A: I'm obviously pleased about this, especially as so much of this music comes out from people who are from or studied in B.C., so I get to feel doubly proud. I'm very excited for the future issue when *TEMPO* will be covering the entire Canadian Composers series coming out on Another Timbre.

I think there's a certain kind of Canadian music that has found a lot of resonance with the British new music scene; it's not difficult for the ear to make connections between composers like Linda Caitlin Smith, Cassandra Miller and Anna Höstman, and Laurence Crane, Tim Parkinson and (for example!) Christopher Fox.

There are also a lot of extremely interesting Canadian composers of my generation who are very active on the continent if not yet in the UK, such as Thierry Tidrow, Sabrina Schroeder, Trevor Grahl, Annesley Black and Samuel Andreyev. This is perhaps because it's easier to hear a connection between their work and that of Pauset, Czernowin, Spahlinger, Rihm and Durieux (their teachers). So I think perhaps the really exciting thing is that the scene in Canada in terms of the kinds of work being produced is as diverse as it is in Europe. And why not? We can at least compete in terms of land mass. At any rate, it's an exciting time to be moving back to the UK, as British ears are already tuned to the siren song of my homeland, giving me ample opportunity to introduce new work to the scene here.

Q: We have new flutes and new oboes; do we need a new clarinet?

A: We have a few, actually. There are two recent redesigns of the contrabass clarinet, for example. One is by Eppelsheim, which is a beautiful instrument with a big and rich sound, and feels much like a bass clarinet to play. The other is made by Schwenk and Seggelke, in collaboration with clarinetist Ernesto Molinari, called CLEX (CLarinet EXtended), which is one of the strangest looking things you'll ever see on stage. It's built to be played with the fingers in a normal B \flat soprano clarinet playing position, so the instrument is mechanised and actually needs to be plugged in.

As for a rebuild of a soprano or bass clarinet, it's hard to imagine any changes would be as dramatic as adding a key that turns every fingering into a multiphonic (as in the case of Chris Redgate's oboe) or one that provides viable quarter tone fingerings for an instrument that doesn't already have them (as in the Kingma system flutes). Clarinets can already do these things pretty well. A quarter-tone clarinet doesn't really appeal to me: we really have stable solutions for

almost every quarter tone, and I rather love the colour changes necessitated by the peculiar cross fingerings.

I can, however, imagine plenty of very minor changes that would make for a more fun new music clarinet, so if the fine folk at Howarth's are interested – and read *TEMPO* – I'm more than willing to take that call!